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ABSTRACT

Freshmen recruitment and admissions trends at Trinity University, a small, independent Texas university, are described. Attention is directed to the weekly rates at which freshman applications and tuition deposits were received over a 4-year time period. The patterns of the receipt of applications and deposits were consistent across years. The fluctuations in the rate at which applications were received within a year appear to be influenced more by deadlines set than by any other single factor. Trinity has three such deadlines: November 1, January 15, and March 1. The rate of receipt of applications was highest in the 3 weeks just prior to the January 15th application deadline. In order for a college to be successful at recruiting, consistent weekly gains must be made during the 6-week period ending March 1st. The rate of receipt of deposits is much different from the rate of receipt of applications. The critical time to begin to monitor the rate of receipt of deposits is February 15th, and over 90 percent of tuition deposits are received by April 20th of each year. The rate at which freshman applications are received has implications for the timing of recruiting efforts, and the changing rate at which tuition deposits are received has implications for the timing of an institution's communication with applicants. (Author/SW)

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A Longitudiral Evaluation of the Rate of Flow of Freshman Applications and Freshman Tuition Deposits

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June 1984

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SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the 1984 Annual Conference of the Southern Association for Institutional Research held in Little Rock, Arkansas, October 24-26, 1984. It was reviewed by the SAIR Publications Committee and was judged to be of interest and pertinent to others concerned with the research in higher education. This paper has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of Conference Papers.

Richard D. Howard
President, SAIR

A Longitudinal Evaluation of the Rate of Flow of Freshman Applications and Freshmn Tuition Deposits

Abstract

This study describes the rates at which freshman applications and tuition deposits were received at a small (3,100 students), independent university. The weekly rates at which freshman applications and tuition deposits were received over a four-year time period serves as the data base. The patterns of the receipt of applications and deposits were consistent across years. The rate of receipt of applications was highest in the three weeks just prior to the fifteenth of January application deadline and there is a six-week period ending on the first of March in which consistent weekly gains must be made if an institution is to be successful at recruiting. The rate of receipt of deposits is much different from the rate of receipt of applications. The critical time to begin to monitor the rate of receipt of deposits is the fifteenth of February. Over 90% of tuition deposits are received by April twentieth of each year. The rate at which freshman applications are received has implications for the timing of recruiting efforts, and the changing rate at which tuition deposits are received has implications for the timing of an institution's communication with those persons whose applications it accepts.

A LONGITUDINAL EVALUATION OF THE RATE OF FLOW OF FRESHMAN APPLICATIONS AND FRESHMAN TUITION DEPOSITS

Introduction

In the last few years, the decrease in the number of people of college age has made the process of recruiting a freshman class for an institution more difficult. Not only has the number of persons of college age decreased, but the academic aptitudes of these persons have also tended to decrease. Inflation, unemployment, and cutbacks in monies available to support students have also added to the difficulty of recruiting a freshman class.

With these factors working to make the recruiting of students more difficult, colleges and universities are having to work harder to maintain their enrollment. Many have experienced decreases in enrollment and the enrollment at some institutions has reached a level which endangers their survival. At many colleges and universities, the process of recruiting students has become the single most important of all institutional activities.

With the increase in the importance of recruiting, it has become desirable to monitor recruiting activities and to be knowledgeable of the admissions patterns at institutions. Administrators and admissions counselors

who are aware of the rate at which applications have been received, the rate at which applicants have been accepted, the rate at which deposits have been received, and the rate at which applicants have enrolled can use this information as a basis on which to develop recruiting and admissions timetables. Also, historical recruiting and admissions patterns can be used as the frame of reference against which to evaluate the effectiveness of a current year's efforts.

Trinity University is a relatively small (approximately 3,100 students) independent institution in San Antonio, Texas. The administration, faculty, and staff of Trinity has, for the last three years, been involved in the process of developing and implementing a program which will recruit academically adept and talented students. As the director of institutional research, I am responsible for monitoring the rates at which applications are received, applications are accepted, deposits and received, and students enroll, as well as for monitoring the academic aptitude, academic performance, and demographic characteristics of applicants. At Trinity, we monitor all of these rates and characteristics on a weekly basis throughout the year. We believe that it is important for our admissions counselors and administrators to know exactly where we are at all times with regards to recruiting and admissions.

The purpose of this article is to present a description of the recruiting and admissions trends which have occurred at Trinity in the last four years. I believe that there is a high probability that the recruiting and admissions trends which have occurred at Trinity are similar to those which have occurred at other institutions, and that administrators and admissions counselors at other institutions can profit from reviewing a detailed accounting of our recruiting and admissions trends.

Freshman Applications

One of the most interesting and important recruiting trends to observe each year is the rate at which freshman applications are received. The rate at which prospective freshmen make application to an institution is dependent upon a number of factors. Among others, these include: the amount of effort that an institution puts into recruiting, the reputation of the institution, the state of the local and national economy, the amount of inter-institutional competition, and the amount of money available for freshman scholarships and loans. These factors tend to have an overall effect on the number of freshman applications that an institution receives in a year, but do not greatly affect the week-to-week changes in the flow of freshman applications. The week-to-week flow of applications appears to be influenced more by the deadline dates set by an institution than by these other factors.

Figure1 is a graph of the number of applications for admission into four freshman classes (1981-82 to 1984-85). The X axis of the graph represents each week throughout the time period in which applications were received. In order to make the data for the four years comparable, the data for each week were arranged to coincide with each Friday in the current (1983-84) recruiting year. The Y axis on the graph represents the number of applications received.

At Trinity, the first admissions deadline each year is November first. This is the application deadline for those students who seek an early decision on college admission. This data is noted on Figure 1 by the vertical line marked #1. The majority of the persons who applied for admission prior to this date made application for an early decision. There are two points which should be noted about the data leading up to this deadline. First, the number of early decision applications has tended to increase in the last four years. Second, the number of persons who made application prior to this date constitute a very small proportion (less than 10 percent) of the total number of persons who made application in each year.

Between the first of November and the last week of December in each of the four years, applications were received at a consistent rate. The slopes of the four lines are about equal and, except for 1984-85, they indicate that approximately the same number of applications were received by the first of January in each year.

The second deadline for applications is January fifteenth. This date is indicated on Figure 1 by a vertical line marked #2. At Trinity, as at most institutions, this is the first of two major deadlines. The critical time to begin monitoring the flow of applications prior to this deadline is a few days before the first of January. This time period of a little less than three weeks (December 25 to January 15) is the single most critical one in the year. In each of the four years indicated in Figure 1, the slope of the lines is higher in this time period than in any other time period during the year. These slopes indicate that the rate of receipt of applications each week is higher in this time period than it is in any other time period of the year. The line on the graph for the 1981-82 year has the lowest slope in this time period and this is the year in which the lowest total number of applications were received. It is also interesting to note how the peak flow of applications continued for several days past the January fifteenth deadline. This is probably due to the fact that some persons waited until the last minute to complete and send applications and counted on meeting the deadline by having their applications post-marked prior to the deadline instead of having them arrive prior to the deadline.

The third deadline for applications is March first, and is indicated on Figure 1 by a vertical line marked #3. The six weeks between the second and third deadline are best

characterized as the ones in which "staying power" and "consistency" are extremely important. The rate at which applications were received in each of these six weeks was somewhat less than it was prior to the January fifteenth deadline, but this time period is one in which consistent numbers of applications must be received each week in order to be successful at recruiting. At Trinity, we fell behind in the number of applications that we received in the first two weeks of this six-week time period in the 1983-84 year and, although we did some "catching-up" in later weeks, we were not successful in obtaining the number of applications in this year which we had in the preceding year. In the last two weeks of January in the 1984-85 year, there was an increase in the rate at which we received applications. This increase was unexpected and was probably due to our increased efforts at recruiting.

Trinity's recruitment literature states that applications received after the March first deadline will be reviewed on a rolling basis. The proportions of the total number of applications received after March first in the 1981-82, 1982-83, and 1983-84 academic years were 26%, 18%, and 16% respectively. This is an indication that an increasingly larger proportion of the applications was received by the March first deadline in each succeeding year. We view this as a desirable trend.

Freshman Deposits

Once applications are received, they are acted upon by the admissions committee and the applicants are informed of the status of the applications. At this point in the admissions process, many applicants are also informed of the financial awards and assistance available to them if they attend Trinity. Once the applicants are provided with this information, the next important trend to observe is the rate at which the applicants commit themselves to Trinity. The first tangible evidence of the applicant's commitment to Trinity and acceptance of Trinity's offer to them is in the form of tuition and room deposits. Since these deposits are refundable through May first, we recognize that this commitment is reversible, but it is, nonetheless, an initial commitment on the part of a prospective student. Figure 2 is a graph of the net (those not refunded) number of deposits received at Trinity in each of the last four years. This figure has the same format as Figure 1.

The first deadline for sending deposits is for those individuals who made application for an early decision. These individuals agreed to send a deposit within 30 days of the date that they were informed of their acceptance. The majority of the deposits were received by the thirteenth of January in 1981-82, 1982-83, and 1983-84. In 1984-85, the majority of these deposits were received by January

twentieth. In 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84, and 1984-85, we had 50, 45, 55, and 94 students, respectively, who made early decisions.

The deadline for receipt of deposits at Trinity, as at most institutions, is May first. This deadline is not as absolute as were the application deadlines. The critical point to begin monitoring the rate of receipt of deposits is at the beginning of the third week of February. This date is indicated on the graph by the rapid change in the slope of the lines in Figure 2. The lines also indicate that the rate of receipt of deposits should remain relatively constant between the beginning of the third week of February and the end of the first week in May. Following the first of May, the rate at which deposits were received greatly decreased. The rate at which deposits were received following the end of the first week in May is comparable to the rate at which applicants were notified of acceptance subsequent to April first (the date by which students who apply after March first are notified of the disposition of their applications).

In each of the last two years (1982-83, 1983-84), approximately fourteen percent of those persons paying deposits requested and received refunds. Also, less than one percent of the persons who paid deposits and did not request a refund did not arrive and actually enroll. Thus far in the 1984-85 year, the rate of return of deposits is somewhat less than the rate of return of deposits in the last two years.

Quality of Applicants

The general quality of the persons submitting applications has improved in the last four years. The mean composite SAT score for all those persons who have made application for the 1984-85 freshman class is 1122, while the mean composite SAT score for persons making application for the 1983-84 freshman class was 1068. The mean composite SAT scores for the persons who made application in the two preceding academic years were each progressively lower than in the 1983-84 academic year.

As a result of recruiting efforts, we had freshman classes of 537, 546, and 520 students in the 1981-82, 1982-83, and 1983-84 academic years. In the 1984-85 academic year, we expect to have a freshman class of approximately 600. Although the size of these freshman classes has fluctuated somewhat, the quality of the students in the classes has improved. The average composite SAT score of entering freshmen in the last three years has risen from 1095 in 1981-82, to 1120 in 1982-83, and finally to 1140 in 1983-84. We estimate that the composite SAT score for the 1984-85 freshman class will be approximately 1185. The number of national merit scholars in the freshman class in these years has been 10, 39, and 54, respectively. Information currently available leads us to estimate that there will be approximately 120 national merit scholars in the 1984-85 freshman class.

Summary

The data graphed in Figures 1 and 2 represent almost four full years of admissions information. The fluctuations in the rate at which applications were received within a year appear to be influenced more by the deadlines set than by any other single factor. The time period leading up to the January fifteenth application deadline was the one in which applications were received at the highest weekly rate. The time period between the January fifteenth deadline and the March first deadline was one in which the weekly rate of receipt of applications was not as high as it had been in the previous time period, but it was one in which consistent weekly gains were made in the number of applications received. An institution must obtain significant numbers of applications during both of these time periods if it is to be successful in its recruiting efforts. Although the total number of applications received were different in each of the four years which are included in Figure 1, the rates at which the applications were received were relatively consistent across years. These consistent trends across years have implications for the timing of the efforts and activities of those individuals who are responsible for recruiting students.

While the rate of receipt of applications was influenced by two major deadlines, the rate of receipt of deposits was influenced by only one deadline. The critical time for monitoring the rate of receipt of deposits began at about the

fifteenth of February and continued through the first few days of May. Throughout this time period, the rate of receipt of deposits was relatively constant and did not change as did the rate of receipt of applications. This relatively constant rate of receipt of deposits was consistent across the four years covered by this study.

The data presented in Figures 1 and 2 were gathered over a four-year time period. Trinity and the world in which it operated changed appreciably over this time period. As an institution, the mission and goals were redefined and steps were taken towards achieving the goals. Part of the success in achieving the goals was indicated by the increases in the academic ability of the students whom the institution was able to attract and enroll. Even though Trinity has been a dynamic, changing institution over these four years, the application and deposit flow patterns have been relatively stable. We believe that we now have stable information about our admissions and freshman enrollment patterns which we can use as a basis in making decisions concerning the future growth and developmnet of our enrollment.

FIGURE 1
FRESHMAN APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

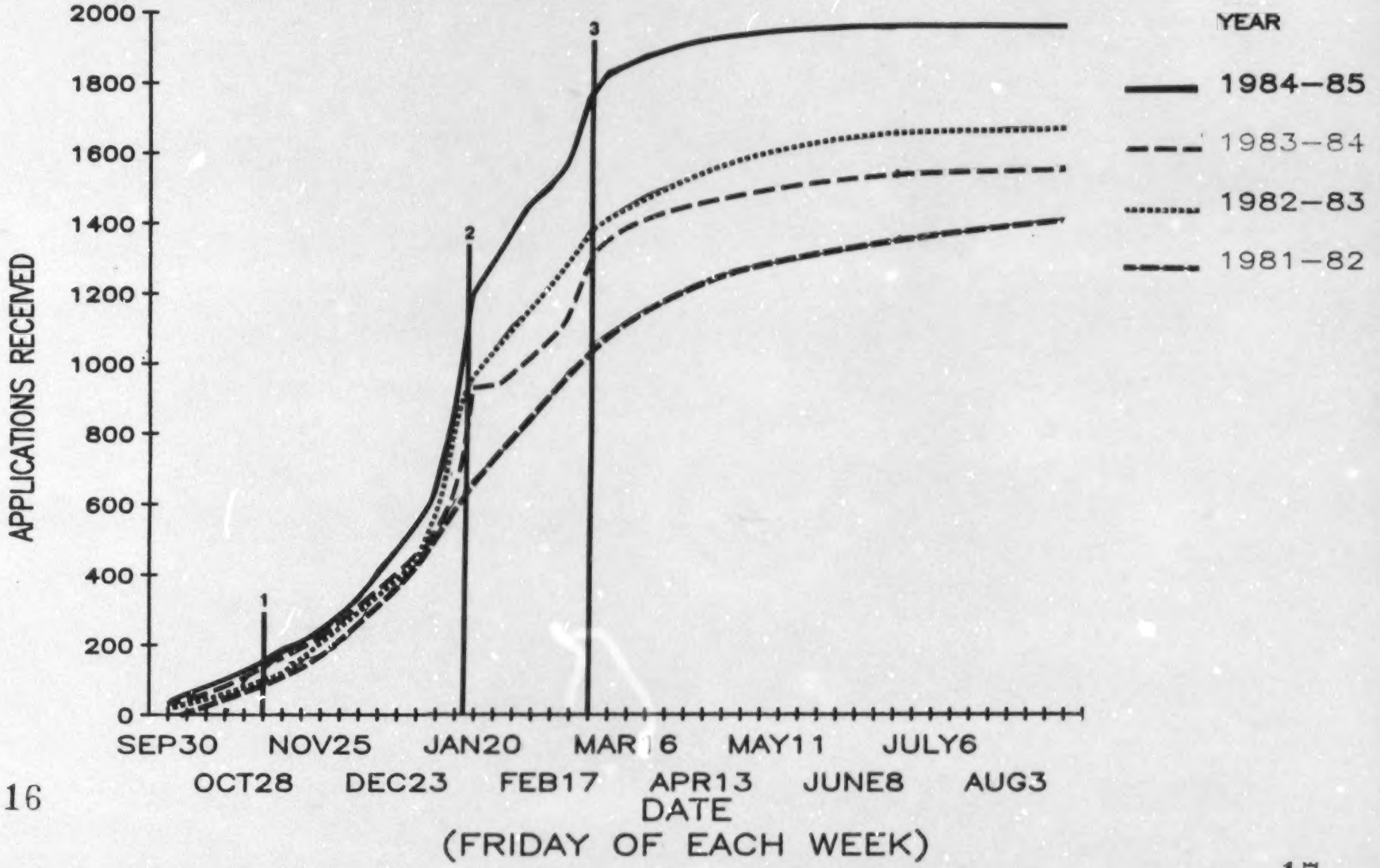

FIGURE 2
FRESHMAN DEPOSITS RECEIVED